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DE RUEHBU #0653 0792013
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 202013Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3884
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5224
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAR 4050

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000653

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR AR
SUBJECT: POST'S VIEWS ON COUNTERNARCOTICS TECHNICAL EXPERT
BRIEF

REF: STATE 40998

¶1. Post strongly supports the visit of a group of Washington-based technical experts to Argentina to brief high level GOA contacts on the scope and complexity of the U.S. counter narcotics program in Bolivia; the current challenges to the program; and possible consequences of increased cocoa and cocaine production and transshipment through Argentina should Bolivia diminish counternarcotics cooperation outlined in reftel. Post has focused much of its limited counternarcotics resources on strengthening the GOA's ability to control its northern border with Bolivia and has discussed the issue at great length with the appropriate GOA representatives. One example of this effort is the highly successful Northern Border Task Force (NBTF) funded by DEA in the Provinces of Salta and Jujuy. Post however, does not believe sending DEA and NAS officials accredited to the Embassy in Bolivia to brief members of the GOA is advisable as we believe it could potentially negatively impact relations with both Argentina and Bolivia.

¶2. GOA officials may not be comfortable with or understand why DEA and NAS personnel accredited to the Government of Bolivia, as opposed to their counterparts already accredited to Argentina, would be sent to Argentina to brief them. Additionally, the participation of Bolivian based officials may prompt the GOA to inform the GOB of the briefing, which may result in confusion, distrust or other negative consequences in both countries. Having the team made up of Washington-based experts avoids potential confusion on both counts. Another concern is how the visit will play in the local press in both countries. The DEA Attaché for Bolivia briefing senior members of the GOA on the narcotics situation in the region has a much greater potential for negative press than experts visiting from Washington, especially with an Argentine press well-known for its love affair with conspiracy theories.

¶3. Reftel does not mention the fact that DEA Bolivia Country Attaché Alex Romero is already slated to be in Buenos Aires the week of April 3 to conduct a two-day office inspection. Post recognizes the potential cost savings of attempting to fit the briefings with the GOA into an already existing schedule, but strongly feels the briefings are important enough to merit a stand alone visit by Washington-based experts. Post requests that INL reconsider its decision to send personnel assigned to Bolivia to conduct the briefings in favor of assigning Washington-based experts. If a Washington-based team is not available, Post requests that the DEA and NAS units in Bolivia prepare and forward talking points for Post's personnel to share with our own interlocutors.

GUTIERREZ